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**Save Hostos: Politics and Community Mobilization to Save a College in the  
Bronx—1973-1978**

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Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, a component of the City University of New York, first offered classes in the fall of 1970, with an enrollment of some six hundred students, at a campus that consisted entirely of a five-story renovated factory—475 Grand Concourse—on the northwest corner of the Grand Concourse and East 149th Street, in the heart of what was then defined as the South Bronx. From the fall of 1973 until the spring of 1979, students, staff, faculty, and members of the community mobilized around the related goals of obtaining facilities for, and preventing the Board of Higher Education from, closing the college. Although each of these campaigns had its own specific realities, in essential ways they constituted a single movement to secure equal treatment and security for an institution of higher learning dedicated to serving the South Bronx and other minority communities. The Save Hostos movement was the most sustained and successful mass movements in New York City during the seventies. While based in the South Bronx, this movement reverberated throughout the City University and the Latino community..

By 1972, Hostos enrolled over two thousand students who—together with administrators, faculty, and staff—endured a uniquely negative educational environment. The college had the least square footage of space per student of any CUNY unit; it had no gym, child-care facility, cafeteria, or

book store. Every hour in the day, Hostos' students, staff, and faculty experienced the discomfort and, even more profoundly, the sense of injustice engendered by this situation. Hostos' lack of facilities undercut its ability to provide quality education and to increase its enrollment. Perversely, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) imposed on the college the very conditions that it presented as the rationale for closing the institution. This story merits retelling because this remarkably persistent militant movement dedicated to "Save Hostos" prevailed over the "commonsensical" arguments of the BHE. Today Hostos' nearly four thousand students enrolled in numerous degree programs are learning in an architecturally acclaimed campus, spanning the Grand Concourse, because a determined movement refused to let the college be sacrificed to the expediency of the powers that be and the ineffectiveness of its administration.

Hostos was established along with other units of CUNY as a direct response to the burgeoning enrollment in the university brought about by the implementation in 1970 by the BHE of Open Admissions, which permitted entry to the university by any City resident who had earned a high school diploma or the equivalent thereof. Consequently, the freshman class in CUNY in 1970 was 75 percent larger than in the previous fall! Moreover, the racial and ethnic composition of the university dramatically changed: in 1960, only 5 percent of CUNY's enrollment was African American, Latino, or Asian American. Today, in large part because of Open Admissions, CUNY's enrollment is 80 percent minority, which almost exactly mirrors the profile of the college-age population of New York City. It was the mass movement at City College in 1968 which had demanded Open Admissions directly led to the founding of new CUNY campuses, including Hostos.

The midwife of Hostos Community College was mass political action. Unlike Hostos, however, this reality did not transfer into the cultures and practice of these other campuses. Hostos

elicited a type of passionate support not evidenced in the other campuses. Hostos had been deliberately located in the community it was intended to serve. The other campuses which had been established or expanded due to open admissions either inherited campuses that had previously served an almost entirely white student population or were constructed on sites without ties to a particular community. Hostos was enmeshed in the hubbub of an important South Bronx crossroads, which organically connected it with the community in ways that other CUNY campuses, whose campuses were set apart from the community, were not. Although Hostos' enrollment was small, each week the thousands of community residents who passed by the school were delighted to see that it was there.

People, some of whom who had never actually seen the college, also rallied around the college because it was named after a Puerto Rican man of letters, Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903). Hostos' astonishingly prolific writings and indefatigable activism were devoted to human progress, and especially to the advancement of education, throughout Latin America, as well as the cause of independence for Cuba and Puerto Rico. He was at the same time one of the most important figures in the entire history of Puerto Rico and revered in the Dominican Republic, where, after helping to establish the public educational system, he died. So, he was equally a hero to the two largest Latino groups of the student body. Last, but not least, Hostos Community College was an institution dedicated to bilingualism, where the full range of disciplines—from Biology to Mathematics, from Psychology to cultural studies—were taught in Spanish. At Hostos, Spanish-dominant students studied Calculus, Latin American literature, and Economics while developing their English-language skills. Significantly, while the college officially adhered to a policy of “transitional bilingualism,” in fact, it was a place where students who knew Spanish improved their knowledge of the language, and where many who at the most knew *español casera* learned Spanish. Not

surprisingly, It was the students from these groups who comprised the most consistent and ardent supporters of these movements. They had been attracted to Hostos because of its association with Hispanic culture and history. Their enrollment in the college represented a type of a type of political statement. For those students who knew little English, the closing of Hostos meant the indefinite curtailment of their hopes of obtaining higher education.

After Open Admissions was implemented, the already existing CUNY campuses were overwhelmed with an influx of minority and working class white students that these college faculties had no experience (and often) no inclination) teaching. Hostos which was specifically founded to serve these previously excluded groups selected a faculty to specifically implement this mission. Consequently, knowledge of Spanish and involvement in social movements were considered pluses. For example, neither the Chairperson of my department nor the Dean of Faculty blinked their eyes when on my application under the heading “have you ever been arrested” I responded that I had served a ten-day sentence for contempt of court as a result of an arrest at a demonstration in support of a teachers’ strike in Newark, New Jersey, that had been enjoined. In addition, the original cohort of faculty contained a number of individuals who had achieve distinction in their fields, including: Al Hollingswood, artist; Pablo Cabrera, theater director; and Graciela Rivera, the first Puerto Rican to play leading roles in operas at New York City’s the Metropolitan Opera. Others had left tenured positions in other colleges to be a part of an exciting experiment.

From the fall of 1973 until 1990, I served as Chapter Chairperson of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), which was the American Federation of Teachers local that represented the professors and professional staff of City University. This position allowed me to play a key role in this extraordinary mass movement. Prior to the launching of these movements, I had concentrated on

building the PSC Chapter. It soon boasted a twenty-member Executive Committee with representatives from every department as well as representatives from the professional staff who nominally were members of university-wide chapters. Monthly, the chapter published a newsletter, which was, at the time, the only organ of communication within the college. It also sponsored a series of educational forums on topics including those on the topics of the handicapped student, retention, and writing across the curriculum. By 1974, 90 percent of the faculty had joined the PSC! This was the highest percentage of union membership of any of the twenty chapters that comprised the PSC. Significantly, the PSC chapter was organized earlier than the Hostos Senate, and in general during this period had a larger presence than any other entity on campus. The endorsement of the PSC, both on campus and citywide, represented a major asset for this movement. It legitimized them and enabled many faculty to join in activities they probably had never anticipated being associated with. The PSC also provided material resources which helped support these campaigns. It financed the Chapter newsletter; it also regularly published articles about Hostos' plight in *The Clarion*, the PSC newspaper that was closely read throughout the University. The PSC also provided small sums of money for expenses such as renting a sound truck. The leadership of the PSC local, which could best be described as Social Democrats, consistently supported the Save Hostos movement and never censured or attempted to restrict or restrain its activities, even when we had clearly crossed certain lines that went beyond what the law permissible by law.

I was predisposed to use my position as chapter chair to define the chapter's work as including coalescing with students and others in political movements on behalf of the institution. Since my high school days in the late fifties, when I handed out leaflets and put campaign literature under hundreds of doors in support of Adlai Stevenson, to my being fired from a college teaching job

for helping to organize a student strike protesting the United States invasion of Cambodia immediately prior to coming to Hostos, I had been participating and helping organize progressive political activities and campaigns that entailed some risk of personal loss, but which sometimes actually won their objectives.

During the Save Hostos years, I did not maintain a journal during these years, I did write many leaflets for the various campaigns, articles on these movements for the chapter newsletter, and a short history of the Save Hostos year of 1975-1976, which was circulated within the college. I also saved extensive files of leaflet, petitions, memoranda, newspaper clippings, student newspaper, etc, from these movements, which later other activists augmented. This is therefore the work of a participant-observer who has had some time to reflect on these events. Beyond whatever value my study possesses, I do hope that it will at some time soon contribute to a larger study that these remarkable campaigns merit.

The initial impetus for these mass movements came from a student. Sometime towards the end of the fall 1973 semester, Sam Saunders, the leader of the Student Government Organization (SGO), dropped into my office and said to me: “You know, it’s a shame how we have to live like this in the College. Do you think we could get the Security Mutual Building for Hostos?” Sam was referring to 500 Grand Concourse, a five-story, recently vacated edifice, located directly across the street from the college on the northeast corner of 149th Street and the Grand Concourse, which had been constructed a few years earlier as the headquarters of an insurance firm that had relocated to Houston Texas. I remember responding, “Let’s talk about it.” On the spot, we decided to launch a campaign to obtain “the 500” for Hostos.

This movement, which was organized around the slogan “Hostos Needs Space,” met with a powerful response. The first event in what was to become a five-year-long mobilization took place on April 3rd, when the SGO/PSC Coalition brought four buses filled with students and faculty unannounced to the door of the BHE on East 80th street and York Avenue in Manhattan. From on top of a sound truck, faculty and student leaders as well as the President of the PSC, Irwin Polishook, told Hostos’ supporters they would continue to fight until Hostos received equal treatment. *The Clarion* published a front-page article about the rally, which made Hostos’ plight known throughout the University. That afternoon, members of the Board invited a delegation of faculty and students (that in addition to Sam and myself, included Prof. Manny Ramos, from the Modern Languages Department) from the College into a conference room to present Hostos’ case. The members of the Board who met the delegation listened with interest to the presentations and related their amazement that no one had ever come to the BHE with these grievances.

In May, the Coalition organized a march that wended its way up the Grand Concourse to East 161st Street, then east to Third Avenue, then back down to East 149th Street. As the Hostos contingent marched through the streets chanting “Hostos Needs Space” and “Justice for Hostos,” South Bronx residents, who lined the streets and looked out their windows, waved and shouted their support to the determined pilgrims.

The marchers had stopped at the office of then Congressman Herman Badillo, at the Grand Concourse and 159th Street, where they were welcomed by members of his staff. Shortly after, a delegation from the PSC and the SGO met with Badillo, seeking his help in obtaining the 500 Building for Hostos. During this meeting, Badillo revealed that he disagreed with the President of the College, Candido de León, about the location of Hostos’ permanent campus. Badillo proposed the

college campus be constructed within the shell of the Concourse Plaza Hotel, which was located on the north-east corner of 161st Street and the Grand Concourse, or on a platform built over the North Central Rail Road tracks at 149th Street between the Grand Concourse and Morris Avenue, which was diagonally across from the site of the new Lincoln Hospital. De León favored a site near the so-called Hub, a major transportation and commercial crossroads in the vicinity of Third Avenue and East 149th Street. This disagreement explained, at least in part, the paralysis of the Hostos administration in responding to the miserable condition at the college. The negative dimensions of this inaction were underscored when Saunders and I met with the Deputy Borough President of the Bronx, George Batista, who reported that our visit was the first ever to the Bronx Borough President's Office on behalf of Hostos. He further pointed out that the administration of Bronx Community College frequently came to the Borough President seeking—and generally receiving—one type of help or other for their college. Apparently, the assumption shared by both De León and Badillo was that Hostos could wait in its present condition indefinitely while this dispute was sorted out. Subsequent events were to prove that this was a self-serving and false belief.

Day by day, students and faculty, who proudly wore buttons saying “Hostos Needs Space,” dedicated themselves to this campaign. Frequent assemblies at the college energized faculty, staff, and students. Finally, on May 29th, two buses filled with Hostos' supporters traveled to Albany to place the college's case before the State Legislature. After rallying on the steps of the capitol building, a delegation, which included de León, Saunders, and myself met with State Senator Joseph Galiber and State Assemblyman Robert García. That very evening, they submitted a bill to modify the state budget to include \$2,500,000 (an amount which, under existing statute, had to be matched by the City) to purchase the 500 Building for Hostos. Within six months, the SGO/PSC-led coalition



had succeeded in obtaining the first Hostos-owned facility—the 500 Building, which would more than double the square footage of space available for the College. In the interim, the Board agreed to fund the leasing of a vacant elementary school and convent from Our Lady of Pity Church, which were located on East 151st Street between Morris and Courtland Avenues. Despite their five-block-long distance from the 475 Building, these facilities did provide adequate office space and some additional classrooms for the Social and Behavioral, Humanities, and Mathematics, departments.

The ability of this movement to spring to life, gain momentum, remain focused, and so rapidly achieve its very large goal depended on a number of factors. The small size of the College certainly helped. Everyone knew everybody else and casual interactions were constant. Sam Saunders, for example, had been a student in one of my classes. The faculty was remarkably young and most of the students had not come directly from high school, so the average differences of age between faculty and students were small. The willingness of the leadership of the PSC and the SGO to take up this cause lent legitimacy to these activities. The campaign to obtain facilities for Hostos was not viewed as a radical endeavor. Indeed, Sam—a New York City-raised Puerto Rican, who had served in the US Navy and had enrolled for some time in the New York City Police Academy before matriculating in the Radiologic Technology Department at Hostos—termed himself a “conservative.”

The success of the SGO-PSC coalition’s campaign to obtain the 500 Building demonstrated to the college community that mass political action could achieve a large and essential goal of the institution. This lesson was the foundation upon which was constructed the much more complex and fateful campaign to Save Hostos. In the fall of 1975, the administration of New York City, which faced bankruptcy, proposed to resolve this crisis in part by closing three campuses of the City University—John Jay, Medger Evers, and Hostos. Specifically, Chancellor Robert Kibbee declared

that Bronx Community College would absorb Hostos, whose bilingual programs, perhaps at its 149th Street site, would continue to be offered in a separate institute. At least, publicly, Kibbee's rationale for closing Hostos hinged on only one point—it cost twice as much to educate one student at Hostos than at Bronx Community College. Kibbee, the BHE, and the media ignored that, based on a highly favorable evaluation the Middle States, Accrediting Association had granted Hostos full and unconditional accreditation.

At the November 6th meeting of the Hostos Senate, where I served as the representative of the PSC, I submitted a resolution, which was enthusiastically and unanimously passed, for the organization of a Save Hostos Committee (SHC), whose work was to be implemented by six subcommittees—Letter Writing, Petitioning, Voter Registration, Community Outreach, Finance, and Publicity. During this fateful year, I served as the SHC's overall chair

The SHC's letter-writing campaign—chaired by Prof. Pat Parzych, and later by Prof. Louis Brown—became the single most sustained activity in the effort to save Hostos. A large percentage of the faculty incorporated letter writing into their classroom work so that students composed multiple letters in various classes in both the fall and spring semesters. For a community college, this was an ideal tactic because it combined advocacy with developmental writing. Pat Parzyzh, who was the Chair of the Secretarial Science Department, assigned to students enrolled in her classes the typing of the letters generated in the other classes. Thousands of letters now arrived on the desks of political officials. Stephen Berger, the Chair of the Emergency Financial Control Board (which had oversight of the City's finances), acknowledged receiving over four hundred letters from Hostos students. In his response to student letters, Manfred Ohrenstein, a State Assemblyman from the Upper West Side, stated: “the mail on Hostos is so heavy that it is impossible to answer each letter personally.” Time

and again representatives from Hostos were told by elected officials they lobbied they marveled at the flood of letters that landed on their desks from Hostos.

Faculty members also wrote letters. Prof. Peter Roman, for example, sent letters to Governor Hugh Carey, Mayor Ed Koch, Alfred Giardino, Chair of the BHE, and other public officials as well as succeeding in having a two-column letter published in the *New York Times*, which in part said: “Hostos Community College is too important to be closed—too important for the South Bronx, too important for New York City. To close Hostos would be to slam the door in the face of those who as much as anyone deserve education and jobs.”

The letter-writing campaign was reinforced by the work of the Voter Registration Committee, chaired by Prof. Diane Penner, which actually registered five hundred members of the Hostos community. In tandem with this effort, the staff of the President’s office carried out the painstaking task of identifying the congressional, state senatorial, state assembly, and city councilmanic districts in which each student resided. This pains taking effort enormously amplified the effect of the letter writing campaign, because the elected officials to whom students sent their letters now knew exactly how many Hostos students lived in their districts. For example, Bronx Congressman Jonathan Bingham’s strongly expressed support for Hostos was likely connected to his being informed that 572 Hostos students resided in his district.

Along with these activities, the Petition Committee, chaired by Prof. Selena James, became another on-going and vital part of this campaign. The text of the petition underscored that: “Hostos Community College and Open Admissions were established as a result of the struggles of people to gain access to higher education. Now, these hard-won gains are threatened. We must make sure that these opportunities continue to be available to the people.” This petition brought the Hostos story to

the community, where people eagerly signed this document. One Hostos student, on a number of occasions, set up a card table on Southern Boulevard in the East Bronx and obtained hundreds of signatures. On March 11, a delegation of Hostos faculty and students brought petitions containing over twenty thousand signatures to City Hall, where they presented them to Deputy Mayor John Zuccotti. The following week, a xeroxed copy of the petitions was delivered to Governor Carey's office in Albany.

The impact of presenting these petitions to Zuccotti was enormously magnified because eight buses filled with Hostos students and faculty arrived at City Hall at noon time. This throng then circled City Hall chanting and carrying placards that demanded "Save Hostos." At City Hall, the assembled members of the Hostos community were addressed by a number of city councilpersons (including the chairperson of the city council, Paul O'Dwyer), all of whom pledged their support to the Save Hostos cause.

None of these efforts would have been possible without funds, the responsibility for which fell into the hands of Wally Edgecombe, then the College's Director of Public Relations. In total, the SHC raised approximately \$6,000, the equivalent today of approximately \$20,000. The largest single component of this sum was amassed from the \$15 solicited from each member of the faculty/staff, 80 percent of whom contributed at least this amount. The PSC contributed directly over \$1,300. One thousand dollars was raised at a Christmas dance organized and hosted by Professors Anita Cunningham and Selena James. Hundreds of dollars accrued from the sale of thousands of buttons that simply said "Save Hostos." The SHC had five hundred copies printed of an emblematic graphic captioned with the Save Hostos logo created by Al Hollingsworth. The single greatest expense was

incurred from cost of renting buses to transport Hostos supporters to rallies; then there were the expenses of endless reams of paper and thousands of postage stamps.

Publicity, which was also chaired by Wally Edgecombe, was an integral and essential part of all these activities. A major pillar of all efforts to convince public officials and wider constituencies to join the Save Hostos cause was the “Hostos Community College: Information Sheet” (developed by Associate Dean of Students Peter Martin), which presented hard evidence supporting this demand. Among other things, this four-page pamphlet (printed in both English and Spanish) pointed out that Hostos had the highest percentage of minority students in CUNY, and that it was the only bilingual college in CUNY. It also documented Hostos’ successes, such as the splendid results of Hostos students on the State licensing exams in Radiological Technology and Dental Hygiene. The “Information Sheet,” which was widely distributed as a leaflet, also provided the factual basis for Polishook’s well received testimony on behalf of Hostos before the Board of Trustees. The SHC regularly communicated to the Hostos community through *Update*, a newsletter, edited by Edgecombe, which among other things printed an excerpt from Congressman Bingham’s letter in support of Hostos, which read: “[Hostos] is not a New York luxury, but an American necessity.” (In *Update*, Edgecombe first coined the logo, “Hostos: The People’s College,” which until recently was much used.)

Shortly after the SHC was founded, the SGO and a number of student clubs, with the support of the Hostos’ Puerto Rican Caucus, organized the Community Coalition to Save Hostos (CCSH), which was led by Ramón Jiménez (a professor in the Behavioral Science Department and a graduate at age twenty-five from Harvard Law School), SGO President Alexis Colon, President of the Student Senate Nilsa Sanieel, and many other courageous and talented student leaders.

The CCSH's first major activity, a demonstration that took place on November 19, revealed the differences in orientation between the SHC and the CCSH. First, the very large demonstration took place in front of the Chase Manhattan Bank, on East 149<sup>th</sup> Street near Third Avenue, and not in front of a government building. Without ever openly saying so, the CCSH discouraged participation in the political process—voting, lobbying, letter writing, petitioning—which they clearly assumed was corrupt and ultimately at the service of the wealthy. Some who adhered to the CCSH viewed these activities as contradicting the cause of the Puerto Rican nation, which they viewed as incorporating Puerto Rican people living in the diaspora together with those living in Puerto Rico. At the time, this was the political perspective of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, which had a large contingent of members and supporters in the CCSH. This also goes far to explain a characteristic difference between the SHC and the SCSH: there were few Puerto Rican faculty/staff active in the SHC and few non-Puerto Rican faculty/staff active in the CCSH. When brought down to earth, however, the focus on the EFCB and the banks ignored a basic fact, the Save Hostos movement had no access to the EFCB, which once established operated outside the political process. Indeed, that is why it was founded. Similarly, this movement of the poor and oppressed had little leverage over the great financial institutions of the city. On the other hand, the elected political officials from the communities Hostos served, regardless of their political affiliations or beliefs, their sincerity of insincerity had to pay attention to the Save Hostos movement. And ultimately, they did.

CCSH's activities combined the call to Save Hostos with the demand to change Hostos, and specifically the removal of Candido de León as President of the College. The headline of one of the flyers announcing the November 19th rally blared "De León: Whose Side Are You On?" The text of the leaflet then complained about the "failure of President de León to mount a militant, strongly

organized coalition to defend Hostos.” It closed by stating: “We will not allow de León to sell us out!” Over time, the CCSH’s attacks on de León escalated. One CCSH-endorsed leaflet stated: “The most important goal is to save Hostos. Unfortunately this can only be done with good leadership; this is why Candido de León must go.”

De León, who had lived some time in a Catholic monastery, was de facto the College’s first president. Nazry Michelin, a Dominican medical doctor, filled this position for a year, but he abruptly resigned after a student sit in inside his office, which demanded a response to the extremely negative physical condition of the college, caused him to exit through the window. Prior to assuming office, de León had developed the overall academic plan for the college. Specifically, he had established the credit distribution for the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science degrees, which to an almost unique extent for a two-year college, anchored these degrees in a the liberal arts. De León also prescribed for the college a pedagogical approach, that he termed a “systems approach,” which abolished grades and was designed to allow students to advance at their own pace. He also devoted an inordinate amount of his own, as well as that of key faculty members’, time, to offer college courses to a cohort of prisoners in an upstate prison who were to eventually arrive on campus.

De León’s progressive and promising initiatives turned against him. His work on designing the basic degrees of the college, which basically remained in place until the fall of 2003, went unacknowledged. His pedagogical schema was widely rejected by both faculty and students who found them confusing and impractical. In part because of his aloof, and somewhat sanctimonious (for example, when he met with the prison-release students he began the meetings with a minute of meditation), personality, De León succeeded in offending the students from the prison-release program who became a major component of the CCSH. The general ways in which De León

subverted his own ostensibly admirable efforts is perhaps best illustrated by his decision to accept an invitation from the United States State Department to visit the Ivory Coast in order to lecture on the value of community colleges at a time when the community college he had responsibility for appeared doomed. Upon his return, he lectured to a baffled faculty about the similarities between the fruits and especially the music of the Ivory Coast and Puerto Rico! While De León behavior was off-putting, most faculty and staff accepted that the president of the College was not in a position to publicly “join the struggle” in opposition to the BHE. Those closest to the organization of the SHC’s activities also knew that, as he had done in the campaign to obtain the 500 Building, he had in fact substantially contributed to campaign to save the College. Shortly after the founding of the SHC, for example, he convened an outdoor convocation for the Hostos community where he publicly endorsed the work of the SHC and specifically praised its community outreach initiative. Most importantly, he had released key members of his staff to work on SHC activities. Unfortunately, his phlegmatic, almost cavalier demeanor, alienated, and even enraged, many students and community residents. The PSP chapter at Hostos went so far as to issue leaflets that attempted to link De León to supporting South Africa’s apartheid regime and United States suppression of the leftist government in Angola.

Despite these enormous differences in outlook and style, the SHC and the CCSH, were in fact complementary organizations. Indeed, for some time they successfully cooperated. For example, a massive demonstration on March 11<sup>th</sup>, that brought eight buses filled with members of the Hostos community to City Hall, was co-sponsored by the SHC and the CCSH. Inexplicably, this success almost became the moment of the parting of the ways between the two organizations.



There developed within the college a mounting sense that the very broad and consistent efforts on behalf of the college were not succeeding. There simply was no sign that the BHE was reconsidering its decision to merge (that is, close) Hostos. The CCSH and other groups—especially the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and its youth group, the Federation of Puerto Rican Socialist Students which published newsletters and leaflets in their own names—began to insist that more militant tactics were necessary in order to save the College.

Ultimately on March 25th, the CCSH occupied the 475 Building. Shortly thereafter, the administration obtained a temporary restraining order that specifically named faculty and students who the administration claimed were participating in the takeover of the 475 Building. The CCSH barred the administration as well as the leaders of the SHC, including Wally Edgecombe and myself, from entering the building. At a meeting held on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Professional Staff Congress recommended that: “The Chapter renounces the use of force in clearing the building at 149<sup>th</sup> Street.” While the resolution also stated that “classes continue in session as long as there is not any interference with or harassment of the faculty,” various academic departments suspended classes. The CCSH had assumed that classes would continue to be offered normally. However, while some classes were held, the operations of the college more or less rapidly shut down. The take over of 475 had put the SHC out of business, and the vast majority of the faculty, staff, and students—that is, the mass base of the movement to save the college—no longer arrived on campus.

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Hostos faculty met at John Jay College and by very large margins passed three resolutions presented by the Chair of the Hostos Senate, Antonio Santiago, which called for: 1) the approval of the negotiating efforts of the Executive Committee of the College Senate to resolve the “takeover”; 2) the renunciation of the use of force to remove those occupying the building while

these negotiations were in process; and 3) the suspension of classes while these mediating efforts were in process. Unfortunately, when a group of students attempted to “takeover” this meeting by pushing aside guards and seizing the microphone, a sharp turn of sentiment occurred among the faculty and staff against those participating in the takeover.

During the takeover, the CCSH transformed Hostos into a type of community center. The President’s Office was converted into a child-care facility, which was quite a statement for a college which had a predominantly female student body but had not been able to provide a child-care facility. On a daily basis, CCSH activists organized activities intended to attract the maximum number of people to participate in the take over. For example, on Friday March 26th, a day-long agenda of educational activities were scheduled: 9:00, “films ‘Attica’ and ‘Black Power’”; 11:00, videotape of the ‘The Poems of Pedro Pietri Done in Scenes’; 2:00, Conference on ‘The Crisis at CUNY’; 4:30, film ‘Teach the Children’; 5:30, Film ‘The Five Puerto Rican Nationalists’; 8:00, ‘More movies.’” On another evening, Roy Brown, the renowned Puerto Rican folk singer, gave a concert. Despite these creative initiatives, in the absence of classes, few students and teachers remained on campus. On the other hand, the takeover transformed Hostos into a magnet for activists from a variety of religious and political movements and organizations. Frequent visits by Seymore Posner, the State Assemblyman from the district, for example, greatly encouraged the occupiers. The drama of the takeover also led to increased media coverage about the struggle to save Hostos.

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, the Board, by a six to three vote, issued the long dreaded death certificate of Hostos Community College. Over the objections of its three minority members, it passed a resolution calling for the merger of Hostos with Bronx Community College. That Saturday, at the CUNY Graduate Center, I presented a resolution, that was unanimously accepted stated that: “the faculty and

staff of Hostos Community College condemn Chancellor Kibbee and the majority of the BHE for closing Hostos Community College as a brazen act of racism and that the faculty and staff of Hostos call upon the Board to immediately reconsider the alternate plan of the minority members of the board (Sandra López de Bird, Vinia Quiñones, Franklin Williams) which allows for the continuation of Hostos Community College.”

That morning, when the faculty had filed into the hall, Efraín Quintana, an important student leader, and Alexis Colon distributed a signed letter stating that the “polarization” that had developed at Hostos was the result “of a state [of mind] brought on by the threat of the closing of Hostos.” They acknowledged that both the SHC and the CCSH had “engaged in an endeavor to assure that Hostos Community College remained open as a separate unit of CUNY,” and they stated that they were “deeply disturbed to hear that many of our professors were intimidated, abused, disrespected” at the April 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting in John Jay. They now sought the lifting of the injunction as “the only precondition for serious dialogue with the Administration.” This olive branch was not grasped by anyone on the other side. I offered a second resolution to put the body on record as favoring clemency for the participants of the take-over, which the assembled faculty shouted down. On April 13th, the police broke into the 475 Building and arrested forty students, the charges against whom were later dismissed.

The bedraggled supporters of the SHC and the CCSH returned to Hostos and joined with an exhausted and diminished community to complete the semester. Despite the death warrant signed by Kibbee, however, the struggle continued. One final—and spectacular—event on behalf of Hostos took place. On April 27th, an organizing meeting called by the Committee for the Democratic Rights of Puerto Ricans, a coalition that include the CCSH, organized a massive march from the heart of El

Barrio, Lexington Avenue and East 116<sup>th</sup> Street, to the headquarters of the Emergency Financial Control Board on 56<sup>th</sup> Street and the ironically named Avenue of the Americas. On Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, as many as three thousand people from all over the City of New York marched over sixty blocks chanting “Save Hostos.” No other event has ever so visibly demonstrated the breath of concern for Hostos in the Latino and other communities. The takeover, despite all of its negative consequences, had forced the story of Hostos into the press, thereby creating enough publicity to bring about this unprecedented turnout for the May 10th march. The take-over had created a public drama that complimented the other activities mounted to Save Hostos.

Starting in late April, members of the Hostos administration and faculty traveled to Albany to lobby on behalf of the College. They received a warm reception from the legislators, and especially from the members of the Black and Puerto Rican caucuses. Senator García’s office served as a virtual headquarters for the Save Hostos cause. In the State Assembly, freshman Assemblyman José Serrano led the fight for the restoration of the Hostos budget to the State budget. Although Assemblyman Luis Nunez had introduced a bill that specifically called for the restoration of Hostos’s budget, Hostos was saved in a less direct way. On June 11, 1976, the state legislature passed the appropriation for CUNY with, in the words of the *New York Times* article, this proviso: “the Legislature [has] veto power over closings [of CUNY units].” The article went on to say that this was “a provision that Governor Carey originally opposed, [but] gave in on as the price of legislative acceptance.” This reversal occurred because the members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucuses had informed Gov. Carey that they would not vote for the CUNY budget unless he could guarantee the integrity of Medgar Evers College, a predominantly African American campus situated in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, and Eugenio María de Hostos Community College. Then, on June 18, 1976, the

legislature passed the Landes Higher Education Act that restored \$3 million to the University Supplemental Budget for the 1976-1977, the precise amount that Kibbee said would have been saved by closing Hostos. Subsequently, the BHE voted to rescind its April 4<sup>th</sup> resolution that had called for the merging of Hostos and Bronx Community College. The Save Hostos movement had achieved its “impossible dream.”

Hostos was saved, but at a high price. The Nursing Department was closed (ironically just as the new Lincoln Hospital, adjacent to Hostos, was about to open), and Hostos faculty—including many counselors as well as two professors closely associated with the CCSH, María Barbosa and Ramón Jiménez—decreased from 170 to one hundred full-time professors. De León resigned as President to be succeeded by two Acting Presidents—first by Evangelos Gizis, a skill administrator who had never demonstrated his commitment to the college’s mission and then Antonio Santiago, who appeared almost afraid of the position. The college changed in other ways. In part because of the closing of the Nursing Department, the demographics of the student body shifted—the percentage of African American students dramatically declined. Perhaps as a consequence of the enormous amounts of publicity the Save Hostos campaign had generated in the Spanish-language media, the number of Spanish-dominant student, especially Dominicans, enrolled in Hostos increased substantially. Even more ominous, Hostos’ enrollment plummeted to around two thousand students. All of the publicity about the danger confronting Hostos apparently had the effect of frightening off potential enrollees. It was one thing to join a march and wear a button to Save Hostos, but it was quite another to risk one’s future by enrolling in an endangered institution!

Despite the extraordinary victory, the Save Hostos year was conflictive, even embittering, for many of those who participated in the movement. So, the academic year 1977-1978 served as a much

needed and deserved respite. However, during this time something remarkable—and ultimately very important—occurred. The remnants of both the SHC and the CCSH began working together to secure funding for the renovation of the 500 Building! The initial efforts were on a small scale. For example, in the spring semester, a press conference was called to announce a new campaign to obtain monies for the renovation of the 500 Building, which resulted in excerpts from the statements presented by the SGO president Nilsa Saniel and myself being published in articles in the *Daily News* and the *New York Times*. The most important thing that happened that year was the bonding of the activists from both camps of the Save Hostos movement. Although much of this was never put into words, both sides had arrived at the same conclusion: the SHC had been a top-down, faculty/staff-led organization, and the CCHC a more grass roots student-led movement. Both had their own strengths and weakness and both served vital purposes, but the dynamic of the movement caused a polarization between the two organizations which lessened the influence of that life and death struggle. This time, key members from both camps made sure that no breach would ever again occur among those dedicated to the cause of Hostos, and subsequently none did.

A open letter dated January 11th—which was signed by Victor Vásquez, President of the Veterans Club and myself, as PSC Chair—invited organizations to send two voting representatives to create an organization dedicated to obtaining funds for the renovation of the 500 Building. The letter reminded the community that Hostos still had the worst physical conditions of any college in the CUNY system. The 500 Building, the solution to all of these problems, appeared as a daily mockery across the street from the college. The letter also asserted that it was becoming increasingly clear that the struggle for the 500 Building was in fact a struggle to Save Hostos. The college was like a time bomb set to implode. Its administrative offices, library, counseling services, career programs, and

science laboratories operations were located at 475 Grand Concourse, a building rented for \$642,208 annually, whose ten-year lease was due to expire in 1980. Many members of the Hostos faculty, staff, and student body suspected that the term of the lease represented the life span of the college as anticipated by the BHE.

On January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1978, its first meeting brought together key members of the now defunct SHC and the CCSH as well as other student and faculty members, including Profs Virginia Paris and Humberto Cañate. The participants in this meeting unanimously decided on a name of the group, Hostos United / Hostos Unido (HU/HU), whose name encapsulated the key need—unity. HU/HU was a coalition, an organization of organizations, comprised of the PSC Chapter and many student clubs, including the Veterans' Club, the Christian Students' Association, the Dominican Club, the Puerto Rican Students Association, the Federation of Puerto Rican Socialist Students, the Modern Languages Club, the Latin American Students Club and the Black Student Union. The problems that had plagued the Save Hostos organizations did not disrupt this campaign, in part, because of the innovative structure of HU/HU. The HU/HU was essentially an umbrella group that was governed by a steering committee, which consisted of one representative from each student club joining the HU/HU as well as four representatives from the SGO. The prospectus for the new coalition also called for the presence of one faculty or staff member for every two student members; however, the number of faculty active in the guidance of his organization was quite few. There were five subcommittees, each co-chaired by a faculty or staff member and a student. This structure remedied the top-down tendencies of the SHC and the anti-organizational tendencies of the CCSH, which had led to polarization and conflict during the Save Hostos year. The inclusion of the clubs proved invaluable to the HU/HU movement because their budgets and constituents became integrated into

this movement. The SGO played no role in these events, because its president had opposed the take-over of the 500 Building. The absence of the SGO caused no apparent loss to this campaign. The students voted for candidates for SGO position, but they expressed no loyalty to the SGO as an organization. The imprimatur from the one organization that represented all the students seems no longer necessary.

In its initial appeal to the Hostos community, the steering committee of Hostos United/Hostos Unido clearly stated its primary concern: “1) Hostos continues to have the worst facilities of any institution of higher learning in the State of New York; and 2) Hostos’ future is jeopardized by this fact.” The HU/HU proposed to the college community that its members join in a common effort to create enough pressure on the city so that the sale of \$3,000,000 worth of bonds would be authorized for the renovation of the 500 Building.

The politics of the HU/HU was more similar to the SHC than the SHCC. The campaign projected an underlying assumption that Hostos was a victim of discriminatory practices. The demand was for equality. In that sense, I was, of its very nature, a movement against racism. Yet, there was another, perhaps more resonant assumption, that is, that the existence of Hostos, as a bilingual/multicultural public institution, was inherently progressive. While criticisms were made of both, there were no demands for a restructuring of the college or a change in its leadership. Yet, the success of this movement led to the appointment of the most (and many would say to this date) effective president of the college, Flora Mancuso Edwards. In a fairly short time, she provided the leadership for the consolidation of the college’s department from twenty to nine.

Initially, HU/HU focused its activities on the organization of a letter-writing campaign and petitioning, which parenthetically no one characterized as somehow contradictory to organizing



demonstrations or for that matter a take-over of a building. Indeed, the call for letter writing and petitioning came from former members of the CCSH! The letter-writing campaign, though not as massive as that mounted during the Save Hostos year, proved an important element of this struggle. Aside from the pressure that these letters placed on elected officials, they also helped inform and deepen the commitment of the students who wrote them and the teachers who assigned them. In addition, HU/HU's appeals resulted in the generation of letters to Mayor Koch on behalf of Hostos' cause by: Robert Abrams, the Borough President of the Bronx; Tom Holbart, President of New York State United Teachers; Cleveland Robinson, Secretary Treasurer of District 65, Distributive Workers of America; Edward Moore, Episcopal Bishop of New York; Community Planning Board No. 1; Manuel Bustelo, Executive Director of the National Puerto Rican Forum; Irwin Polishook, President of the PSC; and Charles Rangel, Member of Congress. Five thousand names were collected on petitions whose text closed with this cry: "We demand equal treatment; We demand an equal right to education; We demand that the 500 Grand Concourse Building be opened immediately for the use of Hostos Community College." On June 1<sup>st</sup>, a delegation presented these petitions to Deputy Mayor John Zucotti, at City Hall.

Hostos United/Hostos Unido would have been more than satisfied if these conventional political techniques were efficacious, but from the beginning the steering committee assumed that a takeover of the 500 Building on behalf of the College was inevitable. In that sense, the more conventional tactics, while being viewed as having value in themselves, were also consciously utilized as means of legitimizing the takeover of the building. After all if the other tactics did not result in a commitment by the State and City governments to appropriate the funds for the renovation of the 500, then the college community would be convinced that an escalation of tactics was justified.

A massive assembly was called for March 2<sup>nd</sup>, which served to inform and build up the spirits of the hundreds who attended. This event was followed on March 9<sup>th</sup> by a one-thousand-person-strong march through the community which first stopped traffic at the Hub (East 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue) and then stopped traffic on the Grand Concourse. For the next two hours, a rally was conducted in the Grand Concourse at which student and faculty leaders, and most importantly, Assemblyman José Serrano spoke. The message from this event (which was covered by the *New York Times* and *El Diario*) was clear—a united movement with support from the community and its leaders was determined to have the doors of the 500 Building opened for the use by the Hostos community. A palpable sense of excitement and anticipation pervaded the campus

Within the movement, there was much pressure, especially from the leaders of the Dominican Club, to take over the 500 Building either during the rally of March 9<sup>th</sup> or soon after. The steering committee, which had experienced the Save Hostos year, vetoed this demand. We were especially concerned that, because inadvertently the evening students had been excluded from the movement, the base for the movement was still too narrow to carry out what was in fact an illegal tactic. Consequently, a third and final major event was organized prior to the takeover of the 500. The HU/HU organized a vigil which was held on March 16<sup>th</sup>, from 6:00 to 10:00 PM, in front of the 500 Building. A HU/HU leaflet promoting the vigil reminded the Hostos supporters that: “Again the school faces a fight for survival. If we do not obtain the 500 Building our college will suffer a slow and tortuous death.” It also asked members of the Hostos community to join the vigil in order to “support our campaign against discrimination.” The vigil was one of the most effective and memorable of the events sponsored by HU/HU. Traffic backed up on the Concourse as cars slowed down to witness this emotionally moving manifestation. A light snow began to fall and candles had

been distributed to the participants, so a touch of beauty and drama was added to the event. This truly spiritual event somehow helped steel the movement for what was to come. The HU/HU responded to the mounting pressure to immediately take the building by issuing a flyer that explained: “This is a vigil and not a demonstration to seize the building. . . . To take and keep the building requires a massive and unified movement of students, faculty, and community people. It requires the understanding from all of what has to be done and the commitment by all to participate in achieving our goal. Otherwise, we will not win. Through unity there is strength; through strength there is victory.”

Finally on Thursday March 30th, HU/HU called for an assembly to decide the question of whether its supporters should “take over” the 500 Building. While this meeting was proceeding, a group of students (who were mainly from the Veterans’ Club) had surreptitiously entered the 500 Building. Then, I announced to the assembly that students had begun the occupation of the 500, and exhorted those present to join those students already inside the 500. Most of those present immediately moved across the street to join those already inside of “the 500.” At once, student leaders (including Norma Ortiz) visited every classroom and encouraged the teachers and students to attend an assembly in the 500 Building. After a nearly four-year struggle, Hostos students and teachers were actually inside of the 500 Building. I am unable to put into words the excitement of this action. For the participants, it somehow combined the emotions that might be felt by the group that first entered King Tutankhamen’s tomb with those of the group that reached the summit of Mount Everest.

After the assembly concluded, the steering committee had to decide—what next? The basic concept that developed at his meeting was embodied in a slogan that would influence the entire

campaign—“Use It or Lose It”! Immediately, a facilities committee was formed which began systematically to clean the building. Students also volunteered to take turns sleeping in the building.

On Friday, the day following the take-over, the leadership was informed that the College administration was negotiating with the Police Department to evict those occupying the 500. The occupiers took steps to prevent the occupiers from being evicted from the 500. Students affixed a huge banner to the fence surrounding the 500 Building which read, in English and Spanish: “With Valor and Sacrifice, We Will Defend This Building,” a slogan that echoed Pedro Albizu Campos’ affirmation: “With valor and sacrifice, we will free the fatherland.” First they organized a picket line outside the building; and then they called for Ramón Jiménez, an activist-lawyer, who quickly arrived. The next evening, the elated but somewhat overwhelmed occupiers were confronted by the Dean of Students who read them a court injunction charging them with criminal trespassing and liability for \$10,000 in damages to the building, and specifically damage to the boiler! Forty-one students (including, Ponce Laspina, Roberto Lugo, Rene Hopelman, and Antonio Martínez), Prof. Judy Nowinski and myself decided to face these charges rather than retreat from the building. However, when the police arrived, they saw students busy sweeping the floors and washing the tiles on the walls of the cafeteria. The students escorted the police to the basement of the building, where they observed that, contrary to the writ issued at the behest of the administration, there was no damage to the building nor to its boiler. Then, the police left. Later, a member of the President Santiago’s staff who was sympathetic to HU/HU, told me he had been present in the President’s office when the police officers returned from their inspection of the 500, and he overheard the police officers tell the Acting President, Antonio Santiago: “Look, this is the South Bronx, and we are not going to arrest them. If you can find some way to arrest them, go right ahead.” For the rest of the

semester, a police car was parked outside the 500 Building and many of the takeover's supporters made it a point to say "good morning" or "good afternoon" to the officers sitting inside the patrol car.

Students with experience working in restaurants made the appliances in the excellent cafeteria in the 500 Building functional so that every evening the thirty- to forty-member core of HU/HU ate dinner together. The cook was a student, Anna Monegro, a woman with a large family of her own, who expressed her love for people by her every word and deed. A child-care facility was organized; so for the first time in Hostos' history, Hostos' students who had preschool-age children could attend class unworried about their children's care. The steering committee knew that the key question—would faculty in any significant numbers teach in the 500—would have to wait until Monday. The answer was "yes." By April 12<sup>th</sup>, sixty classes, totaling 1,500 students, were held in the 500 Building. In fact, one class had to be turned away for lack of space.

The campaign's success in creating a situation where teachers agreed to carry out their work in a building that had been illegally occupied was due to a number of circumstances. High on the list was the extraordinary dedication of Ron Mandel, a CETA worker who had been assigned to the Social Science Unit. Ron, who was also a member of the steering committee representing the CETA workers, became the unofficial Registrar of the 500. He undertook the task of assigning and monitoring locations in the building for classes. In this way, HU/HU could guarantee that teachers wanting to teach in the 500 would have acceptable facilities. The willingness of faculty to teach in the 500 was facilitated by the fact that for the Social and Behavioral Science, Modern Languages, and the Math Departments it meant leaving the "Siberia" of the Our Lady of Pity school and convent to rejoin the campus. Indeed, the chalk boards and chairs utilized in the 500 that had been "liberated" from this facility made teaching in the 500 possible and teaching in Our Lady of Pity impossible.

The willingness of the faculty and students to move to the 500 Building was also encouraged by resolutions passed by the Hostos PSC Chapter and the SGO. Two departments—Modern Languages and Social Science—also passed resolutions endorsing their faculty’s teaching in the 500. Hostos’ delegates to the CUNY Faculty Senate (Profs. Nowinski and Roman) introduced a resolution before that body, that was unanimously passed, which resolved that: “The CUNY University Faculty Senate fully supports the Hostos efforts to obtain the funds to renovate the facility at 500 Grand Concourse. (Curiously, the Hostos Senate adamantly refused to engage in this movement.)

The takeover of the 500 Building contrasted greatly with the takeover of the 475 building during the Save Hostos year. The takeover of the 500 Building was a takeover of a vacant building; hence, no one was displaced or inconvenienced. Indeed, the take over of the 500 afforded more convenient facilities than those they replaced at Our Lady of Pity. This was critical for this campaign, because classes continued to be taught so that many hundreds of students and teachers were directly involved with this ongoing activity. It also meant that there was an available constituency for marches and other political manifestations in support of this campaign,

The slogan that inspired this movement was “Hostos United Can Never Be Defeated” / “Hostos Unido Jamás Serán Vencido.” The facts seemed to substantiate these words. Not only was the 500 occupation continuing against a court injunction, the faculty and students defied a demand by the Acting President to vacate the building. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, the faculty received a memo which, in part, threatened: “Failure by faculty to meet their classes as previously approved and scheduled is in open violation of the duties of the members of the instructional staff. In addition, failure to meet assigned classes clearly jeopardizes the students’ ability to receive course credit.” Prof. Juan Rivera, of the Modern Languages Department, responded to Santiago’s memo by pointing out that “The opinion of

an administrator does not have legal validity as it pertains to violations of a contract. . . . Therefore, we have to conclude that President Santiago's memo is simply informative." Despite this threat to the faculty's livelihood and the students' academic standing not one participant retreated!

The takeover of the 500 Building attracted significant media attention. Channel 5 carried an in-depth report of the Hostos situation and WPIX ran an editorial in favor of Hostos obtaining the 500 Building. Radio stations (WLIB, WINS, WCBS, WBAI, and WBLS) broadcast programs sympathetic to the Hostos story. *El Diario* and smaller community newspapers frequently published articles about this campaign.

After much heated discussion, a majority of the HU/HU steering committee voted to invite Deputy Mayor Herman Badillo, who some of the activists viewed as "a sell-out," to visit the 500. While it is difficult to assess exactly what actions Badillo did or did not take on behalf of this movement, his appearance at the 500 Building on April 26<sup>th</sup> proved priceless. In the presence of the media, Badillo unequivocally endorsed the Hostos United/Hostos Unido movement, which tendered a measure of legitimacy to an insurgent movement at that time was running out of energy.

The invitation to Badillo to visit the 500 on April 26th had been timed to maximize attendance at the largest demonstration organized during the takeover. This was a march which started in the heart of El Barrio (East 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue), went to the BHE on East 80th Street, and then concluded at Gracie Mansion, on East 86<sup>th</sup> Street and York Avenue. A flyer blared: "Hostos is once again in a fight for its survival; Hostos is a College that refuses to die; Hostos is a symbol of victory and struggle, not defeat. Join Us!" Eight buses left Hostos for the start-off point, where they were met by others who had traveled there by subway. This demonstration was planned so that students who attended classes in the evening could, in lieu of attending these classes,

go directly to Gracie Mansion. As many as six hundred Hostos members participated in this demonstration, which was covered by WCBS and WBAI. Also as a consequence of this event, Murray Kempton, the renowned Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the *New York Post*, wrote a moving and insightful appraisal of Hostos' struggle. Kempton wrote: "What Hostos seeks is a treaty of recognition of rights so long forgotten that their very demand is a surprise, almost an affront. There is the condescension on our side and the same desperate protest on theirs." Aside from Badillo, Hostos United/Hostos Unido also garnered expressions of support from a number of other political leaders, including Councilman Gilberto Gerena-Valentín, Father John Luce of St. Ann's Church, Councilman Wendell Foster, as well a number of community organizations, including Aspira, the South Bronx Community Corporation, United Bronx Parents, and Raza Unida.

The final political act of HU/HU was the organization of a hunger strike at City Hall by some of the most ardent supporters of the 500 cause, which included Antonio Martínez and Victor Vásquez. Unfortunately, the distance between City Hall and Hostos—spatially and politically—could not be bridged. Some supporters from Hostos visited the encampment to express solidarity with the hunger strikers (Judy Nowinski could not resist slipping them food which the hunger strikers could not resist nibbling on), but the press never reported on the hunger strike and after a few days it ended.

The movement to obtain funds for the renovation of the 500 was not, however, entirely free of conflict. Simultaneously with the hunger strike, a small group of students, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, took over the 475 Building. The takeover, which was not supported by HU/HU, proved short lived, because the following day six students were arrested and the building was returned to normal use. The growing tension between the supporters of Hostos United and many of the faculty, and to a lesser degree, students in the 475 Building, perhaps best explains this takeover. While the takeover of 500



proceeded from day to day, and then week to week, and then month to month, with all its inconveniences and discomforts, life went on as normal in the 475 Building. It was understandable that Allied Health and science classes that used laboratories could not be taught in the 500, but it was difficult to comprehend why faculty and students from the 475 Building across the street (or for that matter the Visual and Performing Arts faculty who continued to use the facilities at Our Lady of Piety) rarely ventured into the 500 or in some other way demonstrated their support for a movement, which at its essence was about saving the College for everyone. It was also clear that, to a very noticeable extent, the participants in the march and other activities were students who took classes in the 500 Building. After I questioned the disengagement of that part of the Hostos faculty from the campaign in an article published in the Hostos PSC Newsletter, Prof. Anita Cunningham, who chaired the Dental Hygiene Department, visited the 500 and sent a memo to the faculty which, in part, read: “[In the 500 Building,] I observed a group of dedicated faculty and students carrying out the takeover. I observed classes being taught, and apparent genuine concern on the part of the participants in their quest for the acquisition of 500 Grand Concourse. In order to get [the space Hostos needs] several tactics must be utilized. Letter writing and petitions are important. Telegrams can be sent to Mayor Koch. . . . Please select the method best for you to save Hostos.”

The final energies of the HU/HU movement involved lobbying to ensure that bonds would in fact be placed on sale for the renovation of the 500 Building. Members of the Steering Committee met with Kibbee and testified before a special meeting of the BHE held on May 29<sup>th</sup>. Ron Mandel also testified on May 17<sup>th</sup> at a public hearing of the Board of Estimate. Remarkably, not one member of the Administration appeared at these forums to present Hostos’ case. Nor had any of them found

alternate of complimentary ways to advocate for the college while the HU/HU was struggling for the 500.

Hostos United/Hostos Unido's members and supporters could, however, experienced the tremendous sense of satisfaction brought about by the success of their efforts. First, the Bankers Trust Company agreed to buy \$4 million in bonds for the renovation; and on July 15<sup>th</sup>, a *New York Times* headline announced "Koch Is to Approve Hostos Renovation." The renovation of the 500 Building began the following year. Hostos had its first Hostos-owned facility. Once again Hostos was saved by a mass movement.

The commitment by the State Dormitory Authority and the City of New York to renovate the 500 Building led to the next logical step, the purchase of 475 Grand Concourse for use by Hostos. It also directly resulted in the appointment of Flora Mancuso Edwards as President of the College. The BHE's now evidenced its commitment to Hostos survival. Hostos was saved!

While the movement to save Hostos had succeeded, many longed for a return to "normalcy." Nonetheless, for many years after the conclusion of the save Hostos movement—which represented one of the most prolonged, persistent protest movements in New York City during the 1970s—reverberated in the lives of their participants and the college itself. Many of the student leaders prospered by becoming among other things: owner of Medicare/Medicaid centers, real estate broker, Assistant Dean of Students in a prestigious college, chair of a coop board, a Protestant minister. During these campaigns, the students were the prime movers, who learned a series of highly transferable skills and had life-expanding experiences. The faculty who were most active in these movements bonded and continued to work on political projects within the college.

The culture of Hostos was politicized by the save Hostos movement. The effect of the save Hostos movement to some extent transferred to the PSC Chapter, which continued to play a much larger role at Hostos than other CUNY campuses. The University-wide campaigns in opposition to tuition increases always found Hostos in the vanguard—fighting harder and longer and contributing disproportionately large contingents to the city-wide demonstrations. Starting in 1980, I helped organize the Anti-Reagan Coalition, comprised of student clubs, which among other things registered approximately five hundred members of the Hostos community and their family and friends. From the spring of 1986 until the fall of 1990, Prof. Joyce Dunston and I co-chaired the Hostos Solidarity Coalition / Coalición de Hostos (HSC/CSH), which joined Bri McAlevy, a new member of the Hostos staff, with the veterans of the save Hostos movement, in an openly left organization that had a continual presence at the college. The HSC/CSH united faculty, staff, and some students in an ongoing series of activities—that ranged from assemblies with as many as three hundred attendees to discussions with twenty participants—organized primarily around providing support for the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, fighting United States support for Apartheid, and combating the English Only movement. Especially because the HSC/CSD regularly issued a newsletter, it impacted on the general atmosphere of the college.

The University-wide campaigns in opposition to tuition increases always found Hostos in the vanguard—fighting harder and longer and contributing proportionally the largest contingents to the city-wide demonstrations. When the SGO took over the campus in 1991, as part of a University-wide movement in opposition to increasing tuition, the College administration, in tandem with the Executive Committee of the Senate, while not approving of the takeover, essentially acquiesced to this movement, while focusing on preventing the police from carrying out a mass arrest of the

students. Faculty, stayed with the student the entire time, including over night to ensure that no damage occurred to the buildings. Most dramatically, on the last day of the student strike, when perhaps fifty members of the New York City Tactical Police Force marched down the Grand Concourse, with plexiglas shields over their faces and batons across their chests, the single most emblematic event in this entire movement took place. Spontaneously, faculty and staff—Nydia Edgecombe, Profs. Loreto Porte, Humberto Cañate, myself, and others—linked hands in a human chain so that the police and the students were separated. In order to clear the students from the street in front of the 500 Building and in the process inevitably to arrest many, the police would have had to first arrest faculty and students. Instead, the police with their shields, batons, and guns at their side, retreated back up the Grand Concourse. After a complete amnesty was declared, the students agreed to end the strike. Left almost unnoticed in this turmoil was the fact that Gov. Mario Cuomo, in response to the student movement in the State University system and CUNY, rescinded his proposed tuition increase.

It has been difficult for Hostos Community College to memorialize the very events that gave birth to the institution and allowed it to survive. To acknowledge the truth of its birth and survival would challenge the power relations embedded in what is after all a classic bureaucracy. Nonetheless, the recovering of this history is enormously salutary because it contradicts powerful currents aimed at conventionalizing Hostos Community College. The standardization and homogenization of Hostos, which to many seems so sensible, in fact, exposes the college to grave peril. The history of the Save Hostos movement communicates a warning that a future fiscal crisis can cause the powers-that-be, using the identical arguments they used in 1975-1976, to question once again Hostos' existence. When that arrives, the willingness of students, staff, faculty, and community residents to come

forward to battle for the college's existence and the ability of these forces to obtain a fair hearing from the wide public will depend on whether Hostos has continued to be a very special place doing very special work, very well. For many, the college can only truly fulfill its historic mission when, at least in the associate of Arts and Associate of Sciences degree programs, it achieves full bilinguality, that is, when English-dominant students have the option of learning Spanish equal to the Spanish-dominant students learning English. A truly bilingual Hostos Community College—a goal fully justified by the increasing Latino presence in New York City and the increasing demand for bilingual professionals in all areas—will attract enormous attention and support for the institution.

The strength of the Save Hostos movement came in large part from its deep roots in the political experience and culture of its participants. The Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements had proven that a determined political movement utilizing a range of tactics could win historic victories against powerful opponents. The frequent demonstrations and the willingness to risk arrest by those who participated in the Save Hostos movement sprung from an awareness—and in some cases, the participation in—these mass movement. Indeed, it seemed at times that the Save Hostos movement represented the last gasp of the sixties in the entire United States. This movement also drew inspiration from political experiences closer to home. The focus on the “take-over” as a tactic, for example, harkened back to December 1969 when the Young Lords carried out their single most publicized action, that is, the take-over of the United Methodist Church in El Barrio. The utilization of Lexington Avenue and East 116th Street as the starting off place for demonstrations connected the movement to the historic Puerto Rican community. The Hostos movement also had roots in the political movements in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. When the phrase “con valor y sacrificio” was appended to a slogan, the participants in the movement knew that these were

Pedro Albizu Campos' words; and when they shouted "El pueblo unido, jamás sera vencido," they knew that this was the slogan of the tragically defeated Popular Unity government in Chile. Slogans that originated in the Dominican Republic were modified for use in the Save Hostos movement. These included: "En la lucha de Hostos, nadie descasa" and "Ni con bombas, ni con balas, este lucha no se para." Puerto Rican *plenas* were also adapted, the favorite of which said: "Mire la que linda viene, mire las que linda va; la revolución de Hostos, nadie pas atra" These slogans and songs helped build solidarity in the ranks of the movement. The Save Hostos movement, then, was more than a series of coordinated activities; it had developed a distinct culture which helped bond its members.

The history of the Save Hostos movement surely has import and relevance beyond the walls of the college. There have been innumerable studies of the larger movements associated with sixties, but relatively few local studies. Nonetheless, it is only on this level that the gains for specific individuals and communities can be assessed. At the very minimum, the Save Hostos movement demonstrates how very much ordinary people can achieve for themselves, families, and communities when they find ways to unite in a struggle for the common benefit.

The Save Hostos movement demonstrated the enormous power lying dormant in ostensibly nonpolitical structures. Somehow the simple act of coalescing the various and sundry already existing entities politicized them; that is, it allowed them to redefine their missions in ways that led to actions leading to a redistribution of that power and resources.

The Save Hostos movement also opens up the question of the roles of unions in popular movements. The degree of involvement of the PSC in this movement is not typical of how unions have operated in this country. Nonetheless, the Save Hostos movement was very reasonably a union matter, and in fact no one at any level of the union ever questioned that. When the future of the

school was at stake so were the jobs of the teachers and staff. Surely this was a reasonable concern for the PSC and its willingness to respond accordingly enormously strengthened the Save Hostos movement.

The recovering of this history is enormously salutary because at a time of general retreat from the gains made for not only minority people, but working class people in general, that there is great power inherent in the organization of the people into a movement determined to bring about a more just society.